

Clovis buses offer free rides to spare the air

Fresno Bee, Friday, June 15, 2007

In a new program this year, Clovis Stageline will offer free bus rides this summer during Spare the Air days.

Stageline buses run throughout Clovis, and riders can obtain free transfers to Fresno Area Express buses.

Buses also have bicycle racks if riders want to ride their bicycles to work and get a bus ride home, said Shonna Halterman, the city's transit supervisor.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District called 24 Spare the Air days last year, 17 in 2005 and 11 in 2004.

Events

Visalia Times-Delta, Monday, June 18, 2007

High-speed rail workshop - Hosted by Tulare County Association of Governments/Tulare County Transportation Authority on the high-speed rail Tulare County area station study conducted to determine whether a rail stop between Fresno and Bakersfield would be feasible beginning noon today at Tulare County Civic Center Administration Building, 2800 W. Burrel Ave., Visalia. Board members will also honor the winners of the 5th annual "Make A Difference in Air Quality" student essay and poster contest during 1 p.m. awards presentation. Information: Elizabeth Wright, 733-6291 or www.tularecog.org.

State auditor clears the air with Valley pollution control district

Oft-criticized agency gets good marks utilizing Moyer funds.

By E.J. Schultz / Bee Capitol Bureau

Fresno Bee, Monday, June 18, 2007

SACRAMENTO -- The often-criticized Valley air district got a dose of positive news as the state's auditor gave the agency mostly good marks on its administration of an engine replacement program.

Under the Carl Moyer Program, state and local money pays for engine upgrades to polluting buses, forklifts, trucks, farm irrigation pumps and other equipment. Companies applying for funds must show that engine replacements or retrofits will reduce emissions beyond what is required by law.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District gave out more than \$14 million in grants from 2004 to 2006.

In a report last week, State Auditor Elaine Howle said that, overall, the program was not living up to its potential. But most of the criticism was aimed at other air districts -- not the Valley agency.

"They found no major problems at our district as was alleged initially," said district executive director Seyed Sadredin.

The district has long been criticized by environmentalists, who are especially peeved at the district's decision to delay a smog cleanup deadline until 2024, more than a decade beyond the current deadline. The extension was approved by the state Thursday.

The Moyer audit was requested by state Sen. Dean Florez, D-Shafter, one of the district's sharpest critics. Overall, he was pleased with the findings.

"We're only critical of the board when they do things wrong -- when they do things right, that's a good thing," Florez said.

The audit examined four regional air districts and found that more than \$26 million in Moyer money was not spent in a timely manner. Most of the bottleneck was in the South Coast district, which failed to spend nearly \$5.9 million of its \$7.4 million allocation in 2003-04 and reported \$24.1 million in unspent funds as of December.

Also, the auditor singled out the Bay Area district for its improper use of local matching funds. The district failed to meet the requirement that local money be spent on projects that get the biggest emissions reduction bang per buck.

The Valley air district largely escaped criticism.

Still, the auditor found that the district failed to spend about \$546,000 of its \$2.8 million allocation for fiscal year 2003-04 -- a 20% shortfall that ranked the district in the middle of the pack among the four districts measured.

Sadredin blamed the shortfall on timing, saying that in most cases contracts were in place with companies, but checks had not been issued yet.

"Within a few weeks or months we actually spend it," he said.

But Florez said there was room for improvement: "The fact that [the district] didn't have these programs ready to go is a little disappointing."

Much of the audit was focused on program administration.

The Valley district was criticized for using 20 different forms for its incentive programs, including Moyer, which the auditor said could slow down processing. Still, the district had the quickest project turnaround time.

The district's board delegates contract approval authority to staff for all but the largest contracts -- a move that the auditor said results in quicker approvals.

The most significant recommendation in the report is that rules be changed to allow for more projects that cross air district boundaries. At present, only 10% of all Moyer money can be spent on equipment that is used in multiple districts -- trucks that might routinely cross district boundaries, for example.

If the cap were raised, the state could spend money more efficiently -- and on projects that get better emissions reductions, the report said. Florez said he will introduce legislation to raise the cap to 20%.

Methane and milk will work together

Riverdale joins other energy sales projects

By DENNIS POLLOCK - THE FRESNO BEE
in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, June 16, 2007

A Fresno County dairy farm is the first to get California Public Utilities Commission approval to produce natural gas from animal waste.

Methane from the dairy — up to 3 billion cubic feet per year — will be used to generate renewable electricity for homes in Central and Northern California.

Bakersfield-based BioEnergy Solutions was granted approval for the project late last month at its Vintage Dairy near Riverdale.

Manure will be flushed into covered lagoons that trap the methane produced as the manure decomposes. The methane will be upgraded to remove carbon dioxide and corrosive materials to meet Pacific Gas & Electric Co. standards for power plants. Then it will be delivered through the utility's pipeline.

David Albers, president of BioEnergy, also owns the farm. He said he has been talking with other dairy operators and expects to have similar projects at as many as 50 farms in Fresno, Kern, Tulare and Kings counties within two years.

PUC spokeswoman Susan Carothers said she expects more companies will follow with similar projects. California is home to about 2,000 dairy farms with more than 2 million cows.

"It will help clean up the air as the population grows," she said.

The Riverdale project isn't the only way dairies are trying to recycle manure.

Western United Dairymen, based in Modesto, has launched a study in which four milk tankers supplying Hilmar Cheese Co. will run on methane derived from cow manure.

The yearlong project could reduce air pollution from diesel fuel and help dispose of manure in a way that protects air and water, said Michael Marsh, the group's chief executive officer.

Fiscalini Cheese Co. near Modesto has received a state grant for a system that extracts methane from manure and burns the gas to make electric-ity.

It would be the first such system in the Modesto Irrigation District, which might buy some of the power.

John Fiscalini, co-owner of the cheese company and about 3,000 head of cattle, said the system will meet his energy needs and dispose of the manure.

BioEnergy officials believe its system can cut methane emissions from a dairy by as much as 70percent.

The agreement will help PG&E meet a state requirement to have 20 percent of its power under contract from renewable sources by 2010.

Other projects in the works include one by Central California Power to build a 217-megawatt power plant somewhere in Tulare County.

Joe Langenberg, owner of the business, said the power plant will be a hybrid, using roughly half conventional natural gas and half renewable fuel or "biogas."

In November, Environmental Power Corp., based in New Hampshire, announced a deal to build methane digesters at six large central San Joaquin Valley dairies and supply natural gas to PG&E customers for heating and cooking.

Home Fires

By NZONG XIONG - THE FRESNO BEE
in the Modesto Bee, Saturday, June 16, 2007

Visalia isn't the first place you would think of if someone said "tropical paradise." Then again, you haven't seen Michael and Victoria Brady's back yard.

Tall palms, rocks and boulders surround a swimming pool that includes water cascading down rocks.

There's a grass-covered tiki hut, as well as a fake volcano with smoke billowing from the top of the waterfall; red lights simulate the glow of lava.

"We had them put in a smoke machine," says Brady, a 60-year-old retired co-owner of a software-development company. "It looks impressive at night. There are no actual flames (with the volcano). We didn't think that would be safe."

Positioned among the landscape are about 12 tiki statues, including some with eyes that glow bright orange. The pool also has fiber-optic lighting that changes colors, from dark blue to green to magenta.

When Michael Brady knows company is coming, he likes to bring out the five or six bamboo tiki torches and light them for maximum effect.

"You've got to have open flames," Brady says. "It adds to the whole tropical feel of the place. It just wouldn't be the same without some open flames, and the tiki torches provide that."

As the weather warms and people spend more time outside during the evening, outdoor lighting can provide guidance along paths.

While many fixtures are lighted with electricity or solar panels, there are others that have real flames and can give yards a different atmosphere.

When it comes to outdoor lighting that flickers with real flames, there are basically two styles: torches and lanterns. But the choices in those two areas are growing.

"We've expanded," says Joe Cowger, an executive team leader at Target. "Last year, we just had an end cap" of an aisle. Now, the torches and supplies take up a section of an aisle.

Torches

Torches made out of bamboo, such as the tiki ones, typically consist of baskets made of woven strips attached to a pole. Inside the baskets are either metal or plastic canisters of torch oil. Metal caps, with wicks sticking out of them, cover the canisters. Snuffer caps to safely extinguish flames also may be attached. Some bamboo torches simply hold candles.

Tiki brand torches, which are sold widely in stores, are available in more than 200 varieties, says Jennifer Grosshandler, senior marketing manager of Menomonee Falls, Wis.-based Lamplight Farms, which owns the brand.

Besides bamboo torches about

5 feet tall for yards, there are shorter ones for walkways and tabletops. The differences among many of the bamboo torches are the weavings of the bamboo strips and their color. Most are shades of brown or beige.

"We try to coordinate with the outdoor-living themes out there," she says. "It gives consumers options for decorating outdoors."

Other torches are made of metal and can be filled with oil. Brady found a black metal torch that has a replaceable propane canister.

Like the bamboo torches, the metal ones also can be staked throughout the yard. Some come with clamps at the bottom of the poles and can be attached to fences.

Karana Hattersley-Drayton has three copper torches that she ordered through a Smith & Hawken catalog about three or four years ago. They were about \$65 each.

"They're attractive," says Hattersley-Drayton, who likes to use them during evening parties. "They add an elegant touch."

The cost of torches, especially bamboo ones, starts at \$5 at various stores and home-improvement businesses, depending upon size.

Lanterns

Lanterns also can be used to light pathways or areas. They're usually all metal, or glass and metal, and they come in various styles.

Some look like carriage lanterns that you can hang on hooks, while others look like pagodas for pathways.

Some take tealight candles, while others use oil.

Small, glass bottle-shaped candle lanterns cost about \$5 at Target. Cost Plus World Market also carries several outdoor lanterns starting from \$14.99.

You also can find small, decorative metal torches on stands for tabletops, citronella candles in coconut shells, citronella candle torches, and yard stakes with glass-and-metal butterflies and tealight holders.

Keeping the fire going

While you probably could leave the torches and lanterns outdoors all year long, most make just brief appearances, such as for special occasions.

For now, at least, there are no restrictions on when you can use items like tiki torches and other outdoor lighting that have small flames, even during bad-air days, [says Maricela Velasquez, public information representative for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District](#).

"Basically, there's no rule that prohibits them at this time," she says. "But we do ask that residents use them responsibly."

Valley's air brutal on older women

By Alex Breitler - Record Staff Writer
Stockton Record, Monday, June 18, 2007

She's finished her Richard Simmons workout, but 75-year-old Helen Walejko isn't done exercising. She prances over to the rowing machine at Oak Park Senior Center.

This Stockton resident of four decades used to work her muscles by strolling Oak Park in the mornings.

"I had to cut it out," she said Wednesday. "The air is so bad."

That's no secret in the San Joaquin Valley. But scientists are learning more about what kind of pollution is most hazardous and who is most at risk.

Recent research presented to state air authorities says post-menopausal women who live in regions swarming with tiny pollution particles face a greater risk of developing heart disease.

That risk can increase significantly with pollution. A woman in cleaner Calaveras County, for example, might be about 30 percent less likely to die from a heart attack than a woman in San Joaquin County, according to an analysis blending the study with 2006 Environmental Protection Agency pollution data.

Nancy Tress, 65, has always known that pollution could be bad for her lungs. She uses an inhaler when she takes her two-mile daily walks.

Her heart? "I never really thought about it," she said.

Kevin Hamilton, a respiratory therapist in Fresno County, said pollution's impact on the heart is common knowledge to physicians but not ordinary people.

"This is a women's health-access issue," he said. "Women are often underdiagnosed when they come to the emergency room. They complain of chest pain and are diagnosed with anxiety or stomach pains or depression.

"It's very important for women in this region to speak up for themselves" and ask if their symptoms might be related to pollution, he said.

The study by researchers at the University of Washington focuses on the smallest but perhaps the most dangerous pollution particles - known as PM2.5 because the specks are less than 2.5 microns wide. For comparison, a human hair is about 60 microns wide.

These dots of dust and soot are released into the air by driving, construction, farm ing, burning wood (especially during the winter) and other actions.

While Stockton's air fares better than cities to the south, the Valley overall falls short of federal standards for PM2.5. A plan to reduce the pollution is due by April.

"We're hopeful that as we go through this process, we will find attainment is something that is doable, on a time line that is much quicker, ... and we will see results faster" than a similar plan recently approved to contain ozone, said Jaime Holt, a spokeswoman for the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District.

That might be good news for people like Walejko. While everyone knows about lung problems, "it's your heart that gets you," she said.

About the study

- Scientists analyzed medical records of about 65,000 post-menopausal women from 36 U.S. cities, including Sacramento, over a period of six years. The women had no history of heart disease. During the study, 1,816 women had heart attacks or strokes or were diagnosed with arterial diseases; 261 died.
- The authors found that as fine particulate matter levels increase by 10 micrograms per cubic meter, a woman's risk of dying from a heart attack or stroke increases by 76 percent.
- In 2006, San Joaquin County saw a mean of 13.1 micrograms per cubic meter of PM2.5. Kern County weighed in at 21.6 and Calaveras County at 8.6. The women in the study were exposed to anywhere from 3.4 to 28.3 micrograms per cubic meter. The Environmental Protection Agency's standard is 15.
- Scientists are still trying to determine why women are more susceptible than men, and another study is examining the effects of air pollution by race.
- You can reduce exposure to air pollution by checking daily air-quality forecasts at (800) 766-4463. If the air is unhealthy, decrease strenuous outdoor activity.

State air board votes to reformulate gasoline

Special to The Madera Tribune
Saturday, June 16, 2007

The California Air Resources Board (CARB) at their meeting Thursday in Fresno voted on a new reformulation of California gasoline that will allow an increase up to 10 percent of the amount of renewable, clean-burning, low carbon ethanol into California's gasoline blend.

Both ethanol and petroleum producers joined together to support this action and worked closely with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration, CARB and the environmental community to forge an agreement that will produce immediate reductions in greenhouse gases as it brings the state up to national standards for ethanol use.

"By incorporating a larger percentage of less expensive, renewable, clean-burning, low carbon

ethanol into California's gasoline blend, consumers, the environment and the economy all benefit," said Bill Jones, chairman and founder of Pacific Ethanol, Inc. "Governor Schwarzenegger has made California a leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and today's action by the California Air Resources Board builds on that record of success. This decision is a testament to the good things that result when the business community, government and environmental stakeholders work together."

Despite California's continued national leadership in setting air quality and greenhouse gas emission reduction standards, the state's current formulation for gasoline has traditionally included a lower percentage of renewable, clean-burning, low carbon ethanol than the rest of the nation.

According to Pacific Ethanol, approving a reformulated predictive model that brings California's use of ethanol up to the national standard is a significant step toward changing that.

"This new model for gasoline reformulation will allow a blend of up to 10 percent ethanol by volume to be sold in California," said Larry Gross, CEO and founder of Altra Biofuels, which operates an ethanol plant in Goshen.

"Until this landmark decision was made," he said, "California's gasoline blend contained one of the lowest percentages of ethanol in the country."

He added that this action will increase the market for ethanol by 600 million gallons a year in essence increasing fuel supply by over 4 percent, which, he said, will have a very positive impact on total fuel supply.

The California ethanol producers employ "state-of-the-art production practices" that allow the companies to produce ethanol that reduces carbon dioxide emissions by up to 40 percent compared to conventional gasoline according to recent university studies.

In addition, this resolution is also expected to reduce the cost of gasoline for California's drivers who currently buy gas for more than \$3.20/gallon. Today, ethanol is 65 cents cheaper per gallon than gasoline. By incorporating more of this currently less expensive, renewable, clean-burning, low carbon fuel into the gasoline mix and increasing the supply of available fuel in the state, Californians may initially see lower prices at the pump. However, as demand for ethanol increases the price will inevitably rise.

CLEANER FUEL -- AT WHAT PRICE?

State increases ethanol content -- effect on cost of gas unclear

David R. Baker, staff writer

S.F. Chronicle, Saturday, June 16, 2007

California air quality regulators voted this week to boost the amount of ethanol in the state's gasoline, a move that could have big repercussions on fuel supplies and prices.

The measure requires that refiners adopt a formula that raises the ethanol content of California gasoline to about 10 percent starting in 2010. It's part of Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's push to fight global warming.

Made from plants instead of petroleum, ethanol produces smaller quantities of greenhouse gas emissions than conventional fuel. Gas sold in the state already includes about 6 percent ethanol.

The potential effects of the change are complex. Experts disagree about whether California's prices at the pump -- among the highest in the nation -- will go up or down as a result.

But a decade ago, when California mandated a major change in its gasoline blends, the switch increased the hold of big oil companies over the market, raised costs to consumers and boosted refinery profit margins.

The state's air board and ethanol enthusiasts hope the new change will push California's gas prices down. Using more additives will help stretch gasoline supplies in a state that consumes more fuel than it can produce, they say.

But the change will force the state's 14 gasoline refineries to retool their equipment, possibly at great expense. Those costs could trickle down to drivers.

One fuel expert with the California Energy Commission estimated that the move could raise gasoline prices by 4.2 cents to 6.5 cents per gallon. That would add up to \$716 million to \$1.1 billion per year.

"It's kind of a double-edged sword," said Susanne Garfield, spokeswoman for the energy commission, referring to the offsetting effects of increased supply and higher refiner costs.

The California Air Resources Board approved the change Thursday. The vote marked a significant step in Schwarzenegger's "low-carbon fuels" initiative, an effort to cut carbon dioxide emissions from the state's vast fleet of cars.

In a prepared statement, Schwarzenegger hailed the decision as "an important step toward diversifying California's fuel supply with alternative and, in this instance, renewable fuels."

Oil industry representatives say refineries can make the changes, but not as fast as the state wants. Refineries that can't meet the 2010 deadline can get a two-year extension from the air resource board, but only if they find other ways to cut carbon dioxide emissions. One possibility is buying old, inefficient cars from vehicle fleets and junking them.

"If it's the state's goal to increase ethanol in gasoline, we don't have an argument with that," said Cathy Reheis-Boyd, chief operating officer with the Western States Petroleum Association. "You know in California what it takes to get permits, buy new equipment and install it? Two years is not enough."

In the 1990s, the state ordered refineries to begin producing a new, unique gasoline formula designed to fight smog. Smaller refineries closed down rather than pay for the needed upgrades.

The state ended up with a gasoline blend used nowhere else and made by a limited number of refineries and companies. Most energy economists point to that as one of the main reasons California has the nation's second-highest gasoline prices; only Hawaii's are higher.

In 2003 and 2004, California stopped blending MTBE (methyl tertiary-butyl ether) into its gasoline. The toxic chemical helped gas burn more thoroughly, but it also polluted groundwater. In its place, the state started adding ethanol.

The amount of ethanol used in each gallon, however, wasn't as large as the amount of MTBE it replaced.

MTBE had made up 11 percent of every gallon of gas sold in the state. But state officials worried that using more than 6 percent ethanol would make air pollution worse, not better. They even fought with the federal government, arguing that California shouldn't have to use ethanol at all.

As a result, gas supplies no longer stretched as far as they had, because they no longer contained as much additive. The tighter supplies drove prices higher.

"Effectively, you shut down a refinery's worth of production," said Lynn Westfall, chief economist with Tesoro Corp., one of California's largest gasoline makers.

By boosting ethanol content, Thursday's decision should undo some of that damage to supplies, at least in theory. Air quality shouldn't take a hit, so long as refineries adjust other parts of their gasoline formula, said board member Daniel Sperling.

The air resources board did not explicitly order that all California gasoline contain 10 percent ethanol. Rather, it requires refineries to use a computer model to design fuel blends, a formula that will put most fuel in the state at about the 10 percent level.

"As you crank through the model, you find you can go with a 10 percent blend of ethanol, and it's in fact easier than a 6 percent blend," said Sperling, who also helps lead Schwarzenegger's low-carbon fuel initiative.

But the change will require using far more ethanol, the price of which can swing up and down just like gasoline's. Big increases in the demand for ethanol last year helped contribute to a nationwide price spike at the gas pump.

In addition, ethanol contains less energy per volume than does gasoline. Switching to a 10 percent ethanol blend will force drivers to buy 1.3 percent more fuel, California Energy Commission fuel specialist Gordon Schremp estimated.

In a presentation to the air board, Schremp said finding enough ethanol shouldn't be a problem. Production of the biofuel is growing fast across the country, including in California.

Local ethanol producers welcomed the new fuel standards.

"By incorporating a larger percentage of less expensive, renewable, clean-burning, low-carbon ethanol into California's gasoline blend, consumers, the environment and the economy all benefit," said former California Secretary of State Bill Jones, who now chairs the Pacific Ethanol biofuel company.

ETHANOL INCREASE

Additive: The state is ordering an increase in the ethanol content of gasoline from 6 percent to about 10 percent.

Emissions: The move is designed to help fight global warming by mandating cleaner fuel blends.

Price: Experts disagree on what will happen to gas prices, but one state expert forecasts an increase of 4.2 cents to 6.5 cents per gallon.

Source: California Energy Commission, California Air Resources Board

New state standards mandate ethanol

By Garance Burke, Associated Press

Tri-Valley Herald, L.A. Daily News and other papers, Saturday, June 16, 2007

FRESNO — Gasoline sold in the Golden State will include up to 10 percent ethanol, California air managers decided Thursday, a move the renewable fuels industry says will shift the burgeoning ethanol market into high gear.

All California refineries making gas sold in the state will have to blend 10 percent ethanol into their gas to meet new fuel standards set by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger starting Dec. 31, 2009, under the resolution adopted by the California Air Resources Board.

Industry groups said the ruling will almost double demand for the biofuel in California, which last year used about 1 billion gallons of ethanol, or nearly one-fifth of the total consumed nationwide.

"It's just another shot of Geritol in the arms of the ever-expanding U.S. ethanol industry," said Bruce Scherr, CEO of Informa Economics Inc., a Memphis-based consulting firm specializing in renewable fuels. "Once the markets start to fall in line like this, it shows the demand is there and is growing."

A handful of other states — including Connecticut, Minnesota and Hawaii — have mandates for the use of 10 percent ethanol, or E-10, according to the Renewable Fuels Association.

A surge in demand will be created as large states like California, Texas and New York roll out legislation forcing gas stations to sell a more environmentally friendly energy mix, analysts said. That growth is aided by the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which gives small refiners a federal tax credit for using the biofuel.

Blending more of the low-carbon fuel into gas will improve air quality in California and reduce dependency on foreign oil, Schwarzenegger said.

"While many alternative fuels exist in the market, ethanol is one that can be blended into today's gasoline with no change to our current cars," Schwarzenegger said. "It is critical that government continue reducing barriers so that alternative fuels can increasingly penetrate our

transportation fuels markets."

If refineries still can't meet clean air standards with 10 percent ethanol in their fuel mix, they can reduce emissions from other sources by donating money to programs that take polluting vehicles off the road, among other alternatives, said board spokesman Dimitri Stanich.

Ethanol, an alcohol-based alternative fuel, is produced from corn, or from other crops that contain starches, like sugar beets or sugar cane.

Demand for ethanol is enticing some farmers to grow corn rather than other crops and has already pushed feed prices higher.

Officials at Cargill Inc., a leading ethanol producer, have said recently the ethanol's industry demand for corn could raise prices for all kinds of foods.

Many environmental groups support the increased use of ethanol in gas because it lowers greenhouse gas emissions, but prefer a more advanced version of the alternative fuel made by processing cellulose-rich plant materials like leaves and stalks, rather than corn.

Others say the high energy cost of making ethanol, coupled with the degraded land and polluted water from heavily fertilized fields, make its value as a biofuel questionable.

The resolution does not address what kind of ethanol could be used.

"The reason why California has the cleanest gasoline is because it has some of the areas in the state also have the worst air quality," said Luke Tonachel, a vehicles and fuels analyst with the Natural Resources Defense Council. "This is good news, but we need to continue to invest in the next generation of advanced biofuels."

Lawmakers oppose House emissions plan

By Ken Thomas

Fresno Bee, Monday, June 18, 2007

Opposition mounted among House Democrats on Thursday to an energy proposal that would block California and 11 states from regulating tailpipe emissions.

At a hearing on a comprehensive bill that would increase mileage standards for vehicles and promote alternative sources of energy, a number of Democrats said they would try to defeat the emissions plan. It would limit state efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions or the Environmental Protection Agency's ability to regulate them.

That idea "is cutting the legs out from under the states just as they are starting to sprint forward on carbon pollution regulation," said Rep. Edward Markey, D-Mass. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., already has announced her opposition.

Rep. Jane Harman, D-Calif., said she would propose removing the emissions plan from the overall bill next week. Rep. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., released a letter signed by a dozen Democrats opposed to the proposal from Rep. Rick Boucher, who heads a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee.

The subcommittee hearing dealt with the wide-ranging energy legislation that would require the auto industry to meet gas mileage standards of at least 36 miles per gallon for passenger cars after 2021 and 30 mpg for trucks after 2024.

The legislation would create a low-carbon fuel standard, promote renewable fuels, fund research for advanced vehicles and push the auto industry to boost production of vehicles running on alternative fuels such as ethanol.

California has asked the Bush administration for permission to put in place a state law that would cut greenhouse gas emissions, mostly carbon dioxide, by 25 percent from cars and 18 percent from sport utility vehicles beginning in 2009. At least 11 other states are ready to follow California's lead.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger of California and the governors of Arizona, Massachusetts, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington released a letter to Boucher on Thursday stating their opposition to his plan.

"Congress must not deny states the right to pursue solutions in the absence of federal policy," they wrote.

Boucher's proposal would prevent the EPA from issuing a waiver needed for a state to impose auto pollution standards "designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions."

Reps. John Dingell, D-Mich., the committee chairman, and Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, the top Republican, both support Boucher's approach. Their stand could set up a potential fight in the full House with Pelosi if the plan advances from the committee.

Without Boucher's emissions proposal, Dingell said chaos would ensue because auto companies would need to comply with separate requirements from states and two different federal agencies - the Transportation Department and the EPA. He said it would create "vast gridlock."

"How many different regulators are we going to be confronted with?" Dingell asked.

His position is backed by auto companies that fear they would be forced to build different cars and trucks to comply with a variety of conflicting regulations.

"This industry cannot survive with 50 different standards or a dozen different standards or five different standards," said Dave McCurdy, president of the Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers.

Some lawmakers said the proposal would attempt to overturn the findings of a Supreme Court decision in April that said the EPA has the authority to regulate greenhouse gases from cars and trucks.

But supporters said it would preserve the ability of states to regulate toxic air pollutants from motor vehicles and would only affect fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions.

The auto industry has readied to fight a Senate plan, expected to be considered next week, that would require fuel efficiency standards to rise to 35 mpg by 2020. The industry appeared to be more open to the House version.

McCurdy said the House proposal represented "the largest technology challenge automakers have ever encountered" but said the industry would back reasonable fuel economy increases.

Alan Reuther, legislative director for the United Auto Workers, said his union was supportive of the increases under the House plan. He called it "technologically and economically feasible for the auto manufacturers."

[Fresno Bee editorial, Monday, June 18, 2007 \(also in the Sacramento Bee\):](#)

Air board's actions bear watching

How members vote will say much about commitment.

The California Air Resources Board has much on its menu these days -- but not enough cooks in the kitchen.

Asked to do more with the same number of people, the air board's employees have been working hard to implement the state's new law to control greenhouse gases while still carrying out basic responsibilities of reducing smog and toxic pollutants.

Sadly, the Air Resources Board itself doesn't seem similarly committed to the important tasks at hand. Under pressure from the construction industry, the board last month delayed a decision on reducing toxic diesel particulates from construction equipment. Then, on Thursday, it voted to ask the federal Environmental Protection Agency for an 11-year extension before the San Joaquin Valley's air could be cleaned up to meet federal smog standards.

Think about that: Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is threatening to sue the federal EPA for failing to quickly review a waiver for one of California's climate laws. Now, after claiming that the Bush administration is shirking its environmental responsibilities, the governor and his air board are going to the EPA, hat in hand, and asking for an 11-year extension on meeting health standards in the Valley, one the nation's most polluted regions.

It's pitiful. But it could get more pitiful this week when the air board meets Thursday and Friday to approve "early action measures" required under Assembly Bill 32, the state's global warming law.

There are some farsighted items on the air board's proposed list, including the governor's proposed "low-carbon fuel standard," which aims to spur the development of fuels and vehicles that generate less carbon dioxide.

But overall, the CARB's proposals are too incremental and not ambitious enough to deal with the tight timelines of the state law. It is especially curious that the administration isn't attempting to quickly reduce greenhouse emissions from the state's ports, since such an effort could also reduce diesel and smog emissions that are sickening nearby residents.

Even the low-carbon fuel standard is questionable as an "early action" because it could take several years to develop. Accurately measuring the carbon intensity of new alternative fuels will be a major challenge. Otherwise, the crop tillage and harvesting needed to produce ethanol, for instance, could generate more greenhouse gases than they are designed to reduce.

Many longtime supporters of CARB will be watching this week to see if the agency can maintain its four-star reputation, or is in need of some new chefs. The answer will also say a lot about just how committed the governor really is to the hard work of cleaning up California's air.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, June 16, 2007 \(also in the Sacramento Bee\):](#)

In California, new fuel fees are the best we can do

If California hopes to clean up its air and remain a leader in the fight against global warming, it will need to develop new fuels and vehicles to complement the laws it has enacted.

The Assembly took a step toward funding this research and development last week. Voting along party lines, the Assembly approved a variety of fees on motorists, boaters and owners of equipment that will raise about \$160 million annually to develop low-carbon fuels and alternative vehicles.

The measure, by Assembly Speaker Fabián Núñez, passed with remarkably little debate or notice. Apparently that is what happens when a legislative leader lines up support from normally warring factions -- including environmentalists, oil companies and auto makers -- and the media (blush) is distracted by Paris Hilton in jail.

Under the legislation, which now goes to the Senate, the annual vehicle registration fee will increase from \$31 to \$33. Vessel fees (paid every two years) would double to \$40. License plate fees on farm and construction equipment (payable every five years) would go from \$15 to \$20.

Driver's license applications or renewals will rise by a dollar, to \$25, and smog abatement fees will jump from \$12 to \$20.

Some have called this bill "Son of Proposition 87" because its goals are similar to the proposed tax on oil production that voters rejected last year. That's a misnomer. Proposition 87 suffered because it lacked accountability over how the oil tax would be spent. With AB 118, the Air Resources Board, the Energy Commission and the Legislature will share control over grants.

In a functional state where burdens are spread equitably, AB 118 would be amended to include a tax on gasoline and other fossil fuels. But Núñez can't take that route because of the two-thirds vote requirement to pass a tax. Because of the T-word bugaboo, lawmakers are again opting for regressive fees to fund a progressive cause.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Saturday, June 16, 2007:](#)

CARB says Valley just has to wait for fresh air

State regulatory panel ratifies local air board's decision to put off full cleanup until 2023.

The California Air Resources Board approved a delay in clean air for the Valley sought by the local air district on Thursday. The action was no surprise, though it is a disappointment. There

was one ray of hope out of the contentious meeting in Fresno, though: The state board has apparently discovered that the Valley exists.

State board member Dorene D'Adamo -- a Modesto resident -- suggested a task force to find ways to bring the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District staff and governing board together with the large and angry coalition of environmentalists, scientists, doctors and residents of the Valley who are upset with the Valley air district. That's a tall order, but worth trying.

"We need to get a little more involved in the Valley," D'Adamo said of the state board on which she serves.

No kidding. Neglect of the Valley and its needs is an old story in Sacramento, and state air regulators have been as guilty of that as any other set of bureaucrats and elected officials in the state capital. So it was instructive for the state air board members to see the angry outpouring at Thursday's meeting -- which wasn't as large an outpouring as was seen at the hearing last month when the Valley district's board opted to delay clean air for the entire Valley until 2023.

The state board also voted to study ways to accelerate the cleanup in advance of the 2023 date, echoing a promise already made by the local board. More new rules to speed cleanup could be the result of that study.

Now that CARB has approved the local plan, it goes to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which is likely to give its approval as well. That could save the Valley from sanctions including the delay or loss of \$2 billion in federal highway funds.

So, ironically, we'll keep those funds safe so we can build more highways to serve more cars -- which are the biggest source of the pollution that plagues us here. Nobody ever made a credible claim that government is a model of reason and logic.

In the meantime, we'll just have to deal with asthma and other respiratory and cardio-vascular problems that add an extra \$3 billion-plus to our health care costs in the Valley each year.

And as Liza Bolaños, Fresno-based coordinator for the non-profit Central Valley Air Quality Coalition said Thursday: "Today's decision means that a child born today in the Valley will have to wait until her high school graduation to breathe clean air." That's apparently the best we can do.

[Letter to the Fresno Bee, Sunday, June 17, 2007:](#)

Try railroads instead

Responding to your June 10 editorial, "Clean up diesels in Valley trade corridor": Can't we ever think outside the box? If you do the research, I believe you'll find that railroads use less fuel and pollute less. If we could subsidize railroads like we do highways, we wouldn't have to repave for ever-bigger trucks. We wouldn't even have to worry about Mexican trucks passing our vehicle standards. In addition, there is a shortage of truck drivers.

It would take government help and about a decade or so to implement probably. I should write Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein, too. I would appreciate your reporters researching this subject for an article.

Connie Fry, Visalia

[Sacramento Bee, Letter to the Editor, Monday, June 18, 2007](#)

Immigration and Mother Nature

Lost in the debate on immigration is any consideration of the effect millions of new arrivals have on the environment. Every immigrant to this country wants a place to live, a car to drive, clean water, abundant energy and all the other things that add up to the good standard of living Americans enjoy.

But those demands come at a price. And that price is additional pressure on wilderness, the loss of prime agricultural land, further dependence on foreign sources of oil, pollution, species forced into extinction, on and on.

We say we want energy independence, clean air and water, wild lands where animals can run free. How can we reconcile those goals with unlimited immigration? Who is going to tell the wild animals that they must be sacrificed so we can build more houses, sell more cars and exploit our natural resources, all so we can make more money? Can we look ourselves in the mirror and say, "All I care about is my bank account?"

Scott Slotterbeck, Sacramento